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THE PATTERN OF ILLEGAL ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ACTIVITY IN GERMANY AFTER THE LAST WAR: THE FREE CORPS

Description

A discussion of the activities of the German Free Corps after 1918, their origin, composition, and significance in the eventual overthrow of the Weimar Republic.

13 October 1944

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SUMMARY

1. After the last war, the reaction to defeat and the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty brought about the formation of volunteer military organizations or Free Corps. These groups fought on the eastern frontier to prevent any territorial changes, opposed the Allied occupation of the Rhineland, and waged a civil war in Germany to prevent the democratic alteration of the political and social structure of Germany.

2. The Free Corps were composed largely of officers and professional soldiers who lacked either civil or military employment. They were supported by social groups which feared the consequences of a democratic state in Germany and by economic leaders who wished to reestablish Germany's international position. Financial support was given by the members of the industrial and financial leadership which at a later time supported the Nazi Party.

3. Acting under pressure from the Allies, the German Government formally dissolved the Free Corps in 1920. While many members returned to civilian life, the activists refused to give up their fight for the remilitarization of Germany and the overthrow of the Weimar state. They formed secret military leagues which operated as an "underground" throughout the existence of the Weimar Republic. Due to the lack of effective controls by the Allies and the presence of sympathetic elements in the German judiciary and Army, the Weimar government was never able to suppress completely the actions and "Feme" murders of the secret military leagues.

4. The Free Corps men and the secret leagues were gradually absorbed into the Nazi Party. At the present time, many high officials of the Party are former Free Corps leaders,

while countless others were recruited for the SA and SS. Other Free Corps men have become prominent in economic administration and in the Army.

THE PATTERN OF ILLEGAL ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ACTIVITY IN GERMANY AFTER THE LAST WAR: THE FREE CORPS

I. THE FREE CORPS AND SECRET MILITARY LEAGUES

After the German defeat in 1918, there was a widespread nationalistic reaction to the revolution and the formation of the new republic, the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and the changes in the pre-war frontiers. This reaction, resulting, in part, in the formation of volunteer military groups of Free Corps, produced both a civil war in Germany and an undeclared war on the German frontiers.

A. Origin and Composition of the Free Corps

The activity of the Free Corps in the period immediately following the German defeat was inspired by many historic examples of nationalist struggles by Germans against foreign controls. Instances were found in the Middle Ages and the Thirty Years' War, but the chief inspiration came from the German struggle against French and Austrian control in the nineteenth century. The methods of overcoming the limitations placed on the Prussian Army in 1806 by Napoleon were idealized as the proper way to create a body of trained reserves to strengthen the small army permitted by the Treaty of Versailles. The names of Germans who fought against the French were attached to important Free Corps after 1919.[1]

In 1918-1919 the lack of control either by the German Government or Allied authority permitted the revival of activist nationalism directed by the Free Corps against the Weimar Republic and those foreign states held responsible for the limitations on national sovereignty and territorial changes made in the boundaries of pre-war Germany. The actions of the Free Corps were directed with equal violence

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1. F. W. von Oertzen, Die deutschen Freikorps, München, 1938, viii-ix.

against Poles, Russians, French, and the "November criminals" who were alleged to have stabbed the German army in the back. The stab-in-the-back legend united the activities of the illegal groups and those who operated through the German parliamentary system in opposing the republic.

As a result of the revolution the provisional German Government was faced early in 1919 by left-wing insurrections aiming at the creation of a state and society based on the successful example of the Russian Bolshevists. The characteristic revolutionary device of 1918-1919 was the Workers and Soldiers Council, comparable at least in form to the soviets which carried the Russian Revolution to a successful conclusion. The councils (Räte) in Germany were generally formed by garrison troops whose emergence as a governing power was deeply resented by the commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the front army. The workers on the councils were identified in the nationalistic mind with Spartacus, the Communist organization, which in turn was believed to be plotting the Bolshevization of Germany. In addition to revolutionary threats, the confusion of the post-war years permitted the revival of separatist and particularist movements which had long been dormant. Separatism was in direct conflict with the nationalist aims of the Free Corps which fought to prevent any dismemberment of Germany.

It is not possible to list all the Free Corps, Home Defense Leagues, Border Defense Leagues, Academic Guards, and countless other groups which sprang up in all parts of Germany in the confused days which followed 1918. The Free Corps, which are of the greatest traditionalist importance among these groups, went through two stages of development. In terms of their origin, they were theoretically

established by Gustav Noske, the Social Democratic Minister of Defense, as volunteer forces to suppress internal disorder and guard the frontiers. In this sense, the Free Corps can be construed as "legal" institutions serving the republic as transitional defense forces pending the establishment of the Reichswehr and a police force. They took an oath to support the government and protect the Fatherland. After the establishment of security forces in 1919, however, the Free Corps continued to operate as illegal bodies in defiance both of a government order to disband and the Law for the Defense of the Republic (1920) which forbade the existence of military leagues.

The first Free Corps appeared in Berlin in December 1918, when the General Staff, acting on the suggestion of Kurt von Schleicher, authorized enlistments in volunteer groups to provide for border defense and general security troops in the Reich.[1] Under the provisions of this authorization, a Free Corps was established by General Maercker composed of officers and men picked from the 214th Division in Berlin. The great majority of the men selected for the Freiwillige Landes-Jägerkorps were front-line sergeants, while the officers were the professionals of the old Imperial officers corps.[2] Maercker offered his Free Corps to the government, and its slogan "For Law and Order against Spartacus" appealed to Noske, who was faced with the problem of suppressing Communist disorder without effective military forces. This development in Berlin was paralleled by the

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1. Gerhardt Thomée, Der Wiederaufsteig des Deutschen Heeres, 1919-30, Berlin, 1939, pp. 13-23, Von Schleicher, later a General and Chancellor, was killed in the Blood Purge of 1934.
2. J. Benoist-Mechin, History of the German Army since the Armistice, Zurich, 1939, I, 116; General von Maercker, Vom Kaiserheer zum Reichswehr, Geschichte des Freiwilligen Landes-Jägerkorps, Leipzig, 1921.

formation of hundreds of volunteer defense groups throughout Germany.

The average Free Corps was a volunteer military organization grouped around a leader. Its group life was controlled by the traditions of authoritarian military discipline and obedience inherited from the Imperial Army. The word of the leader of the Corps was absolute and he could punish severely any infractions of the rules, which were either made by the leader who recruited the group or were based on the model of the Grundlegender Befehl of the Maercker Landes-Jägerkorps. These regulations, which reflected Prussian military traditions, were enforced by non-commissioned officers assisted by Vertrauensleute (agents) in the ranks. For betrayal of the secrets of the groups about personnel or sources of funds and munitions, the punishment was death, a procedure which developed into the Feme murders. The Free Corps became, therefore, an important factor in spreading the conception of authoritarian rule, as each group operated strictly on the leadership principle.

The composition of the Free Corps varied, but the majority of the members was drawn from the officers and front soldiers of the old army. One of the outstanding Free Corps men, Ernst von Salomann, makes the point that the members cannot be classified as sociological types or members of any specific economic status or age group.[1] He claims that the post-war fighters were motivated solely by considerations of patriotism and were "united in spirit" with nationalistic fighters of all types in German history. Nevertheless, the bulk of the members came from the ranks of the professional officers, landlords and others from rural areas -- in general from the conservative groups in German society which

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1. Ernst von Salomann, Nahe Geschichte

feared the spread of Communism and the growth in political power of the proletariat and the urban petty bourgeoisie.

For the most part, the members of the Free Corps were either young men who had known no profession but that of fighting, or officers who had received no vocational training except in military tactics. They were the activists who could not adapt themselves to peaceful life and who sought to protect their ideological and vocational interests by violent action against a wide variety of alleged enemies.[1]

In the revolutionary period immediately following defeat, the officers regarded the members of the Soldiers and Workers Councils (Räte) as "Schweine." When the front army marched home, many officers were assaulted in the streets by the revolutionaries and insignia and decorations were torn off their uniforms. The Army was demobilized under the authority of the councils and the officers were turned loose with little hope of employment. The Allied peace terms, as well as the attitude of the Weimar government, made it evident that the vast majority of the former officers would not be able to pursue their military careers or obtain employment consistent with their sense of honor and importance. The limitation of the army to 100,000 men destroyed the

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1. (No statistics have ever been collected concerning the social status and age groups of the personnel of the Free Corps. The following table of ages represented in the Corps is based on the ages of the German members of Major Fletcher's Baltische Landeswehr who were killed in action in the Baltic war. These figures are derived from Die Baltische Landeswehr, herausgegeben von Baltische Landeswehrverein, 1929.

Age	No. killed	Age	No. killed	Age	No. killed
15	4	21	21	27	10
16	6	22	28	28	13
17	19	23	22	29	5
18	33	24	29	30-35	13
19	41	25	17	36-40	5
20	31	26	14	41-50	17
				Over 50	6

personal future of the officers; in their opinion it was also a humiliation to the national honor of Germany. The Free Corps, therefore, served a dual purpose -- they provided paid employment in the profession of arms, and at the same time provided means for rebuilding the power of defeated Germany.

In addition to the officers, the Free Corps attracted the front soldiers, who after four years of war, were accustomed to a life filled with continuous fighting. A mythology was developed in Germany after the last war extolling the virtues of the Frontsoldaten. They were idealized in nationalistic literature and the outlook attributed to them was important in motivating the Free Corps as well as conservative-nationalist politics. Various organizations were founded to perpetuate the spirit of "comradeship" of the front soldiers or to extend that spirit to German youth who had not been engaged in war.

The Free Corps rapidly developed their own mythology in justification of their existence. The names of Yorck, Schill, Lützow, Bismarck, Hindenburg and other nationalist heroes appeared on their standards. The flag of the Ehrhardt Marine Brigade contained the symbol of a Viking ship, while the Hamburg Free Corps in the Baltische Landeswehr carried above the Hansa flag the black pennant of the famous pirate Klaus Störtebecker. Many Free Corps men pictured themselves as the successors of the Teutonic Knights who brought "a new faith and a new race into the world" and saved Germany from "the Asiatic hordes."[1] Other groups, particularly the Rossbach Brigade, not only spoke in terms of German nationalism, but openly glorified the male society of the Free Corps and regarded homosexuality as differentiating them from the ordinary civilian population.

B. The Activities of the Free Corps

The Berlin government called the Free Corps into existence

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1. Salomann, The Outcasts, 61-65; Nahe Geschichte, 18-19.

in 1919 to suppress the Communist uprisings. In Berlin, the Spartacist insurrections were crushed with great violence and the leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were "shot while attempting to escape." The same pattern was used in suppressing the Spartacist movement and the Rätere-publik elsewhere throughout Germany. After the assassination of Kurt Eisner, the Free Corps of southern Germany converged on Munich to destroy the Soviet Republic, while those of northern Germany marched on the Communist stronghold in Hamburg. In western Germany, the Corps were less successful in opposing the revolutionaries. The Freikorps Lützow was driven out of Remscheid and was saved only by flight across the demarcation line into occupied territory. The Frei-korps Lichtschlag was wiped out at Wetter a. Ruhr.

The use of these volunteer corps against the revolutionary elements of the German population strengthened the existing mutual antagonisms between the conservative-nationalist groups and the proletariat. Yet the government considered that it had little choice but to entrust its defense to groups which were determined to overthrow the republic. So much did the government fear the leftists that it brought the Maercker Landes-Jägerkorps to Weimar in 1919 to guard the National Assembly while the constitution was being written. The use of the Free Corps to suppress the revolution did a great deal to establish the anti-Bolshevist and anti-democratic attitudes which were finally integrated into the totalitarian philosophy of the Third Reich.

C. The War on the German Frontiers and Military Counter-revolution

The war on the German frontiers after the armistice was of greater importance in the formulation of the traditions of continuous fighting and in the development of subversive techniques. The first phase of Free Corps activity on the

frontiers was in the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania which had been occupied by German troops at the time of the Russian Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The armistice in 1918 specifically called for the withdrawal of the Germans, but after the threatened invasion of the Baltic states by the Red Army, the Allies did not press the demands for the evacuation of the German troops. These troops under the control of General von der Golz were combined into several units, such as the Iron Division, made up of numerous Free Corps; and the Baltische Landeswehr which included German Free Corps, White Russians, Balt landlords and Latvians. The Latvian government promised citizenship, land and pay to all German volunteers who served for a minimum of four weeks in these formations. In April 1919, the Balt landlords in the Landeswehr overthrew the Latvian Government and established a military dictatorship which was supported by the Germans.

In the face of an Allied demand to disband his corps, von der Golz invaded Estonia and was badly defeated in the battle of Wenden. The Germans persisted in their refusal to withdraw from Latvia despite the retreat of the Red Army, until the Allies threatened a renewal of the blockade. The German Government finally decreed that all Germans who had not returned across the frontier by 11 November 1919 would lose their citizenship.

The Baltic war is important in establishing the traditions of Free Corps activity and solidarity. The personnel, drawn from all parts of Germany, and led by the East Prussian aristocracy, fought against the Red Army with the approval of the German Government which provided them with arms, munitions, and uniforms from the stores of the Imperial Army. The ultimate authority over the Baltische Landeswehr and the Iron Division was the Latvian Government, but in reality the German

formations were free-booting expeditions, approved by the German Government and General Staff, intent on fighting and seizing land. Von der Golz planned the establishment of an independent buffer state in the Baltic made up of German soldier-farmers who, it was claimed, would be constantly prepared to defend Germany and the world against Russian Bolshevism.

The leaders read to the Free Corps the German Government's order to disband and turn in their arms, but they refused to comply. The major groups marched back to Germany, firm in the belief that they were carrying out a "world mission" of combating "the unholy consequences of Russian Bolshevism."[1] The bands soon appeared as the instrument of the counter-revolution against the Weimar state when the German corps marched from Riga to Berlin to participate in the Kapp Putsch of 1920.

The effort to overthrow the Weimar state by the Kapp Putsch was based on the military power of the Ehrhardt Marine Brigade and other Free Corps. The Ehrhardt Brigade marched into Berlin from its winter quarters at Doberitz on 13 March 1920, where it was greeted by Ludendorff and numerous Reichswehr generals. The genius of the Kapp Putsch was not Kapp, but Ehrhardt who was regarded in conservative-nationalist circles as the potential "savior" of Germany. His objective was the overthrow of the republic and the establishment of a military dictatorship which would recover Germany's lost prestige and prepare the way for the restoration of the monarchy. The Brigade, composed largely of former naval officers, represented the aristocracy and ultra-conservative social groups. The troops carried the imperial flag and their helmets bore the swastika emblem. Many smaller Free Corps flocked to the Ehrhardt standard and local insurrections

1. Darstellungen aus den Nachkriegskämpfer deutscher Truppen und Freikorps, Die Kampfe um Baltikum nach der zweiten Einnahme von Riga, 1938.

took place in several parts of Germany. The Putsch, however, was centered almost entirely in Berlin and in the area east of the Elbe River. In Bavaria, the Social Democratic government was forced out by the Free Corps, and in Central Germany there were many disturbances, but no clear-cut majority appeared for either side. In the rest of Germany, the population declared themselves in favor of the republic.[1]

The Kapp Putsch was not suppressed by the military forces of the republic, nor were the perpetrators ever punished for their treasonable activity. The Putsch was liquidated by a general strike called by the trade unions, a fact which deepened the hostility between the Free Corps and German labor.

At the same time that the Free Corps were fighting in the Baltic states and attempting a Putsch in Berlin, another undeclared war was being fought in Silesia. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that the German troops evacuate Silesia and that the area be placed under international control until a plebiscite should decide its ultimate disposition. The Poles, under the former Reichstag deputy Korfanty, revolted against the Germans and in the local elections in November 1919 won a clear majority. The Free Corps immediately began to gather and were united into a Kampforganisation des deutschen Schutzbündes, operating under the orders of the old Sixth Army Corps at Breslau. The headquarters staff in Breslau consisted of Reichswehr officers on indefinite leave. The field headquarters of the German volunteer forces was at Kattowitz. A sum of 20 million marks is reputed to have been granted by the German Government while the remainder of the cost was borne by the mine

1. Rosenberg, History of the German Republic, 135 ff.

owners, heavy industries, and big estates whose interests would be affected by the transfer of Upper Silesia to Poland.

The members of the Free Corps were divided into small groups under the command of an officer. They lived on the big estates as agricultural workers and experts, and the commanding officer was usually the "manager" of the estate, as for example the future Nazi leader, Martin Bormann, who was an estate manager while serving as chief of staff of the Rossbach Brigade. Many railway workers enrolled as members of the Free Corps and by commandeering entire trains played a vital role in the transportation of men and supplies. Various devices were used to smuggle arms in defiance of the Allied Control Commission, such as the sending in of thousands of rifles without butts labeled as "scrap iron." The butts were then manufactured in the woodworking department of the Friedenshütte foundry and guns assembled in secret arsenals. The large firms of Berg und Hüttemann, Laurahütte and others, contributed money and gave positions to the Free Corps leaders to disguise their operations. The Einwohnerwehr (home defense leagues) in the towns along the demarcation line drilled openly and refused to give up their arms, while the Sicherheitspolizei distributed guns to the civilian population in open defiance of the law and international controls. The Free Corps established an espionage service operating as a purchasing agency for the Wera Kompagnie für Chemische-technische Produkte, located in the hotel which served as the chief rendezvous for the officers of the International Commission. The most daring members of the Corps were chosen as "special police" of the Kampforganisation. A former police inspector trained them in the art of "fighting in the dark" in a special school in Kattowitz, and they studied such subjects

as the method of falsifying passports, shadowing suspects, use of explosives, and lockpicking.[1]

The international control forces arrived in 1920, but despite their presence the Germans and Poles fought each other in small armed bands and propagandized for the coming plebiscite. After the Germans won an outstanding victory in the plebiscite, the Poles again revolted and the Free Corps opened a general offensive which resulted in the capture of Annaberg. The German troops finally withdrew in 1920 but only after the French threatened to occupy the Ruhr unless they laid down their arms.

D. The Struggle against Allied Occupation

The occupation of the Rhineland by Allied forces after the war provided a motivation for the Free Corps to sabotage the work of the occupation forces as well as to combat the Berlin Government which accepted the peace settlement. The nationalistic groups, however, could not operate openly in the face of strict military controls, but could only carry out their work as secret societies.

The extent of nationalistic opposition in the Rhineland depended on the strength of separatist tendencies and the nature of the occupation policy. In the American zone, no widespread resistance developed due to the comparative freedom of political action. In the French and Belgian zones, where local political life was more rigidly controlled, a widespread resistance was developed by the Free Corps. Both nationalistic and Communist groups were organized to a small extent among the local inhabitants or were dispatched in large numbers from other parts of Germany to fight primarily against the Rhineland separatists.

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1. A full account of these techniques may be found in Glombowski, Frontiers of Terror, pp. 56-7, 65.

The fight against occupation and separation was particularly strong after the extension of the French occupation to the Ruhr in 1923. When French troops came in, the leaders of the former corps called their trusted men to assemble secretly and prepare for war. One of the leading spirits of the Ruhr struggle was Leo Schlageter, claimed by the Nazis as one of their early martyrs and extolled by the Communists in 1923 as a hero of German nationalism. His corps, along with many others, flocked to the Ruhr to engage in sabotage of transportation facilities. Their chief work, however, was in preventing the establishment of the Rhenish Republic by the Rhineland separatist movement. An espionage service, called the Lorenzer group, was set up by Schlageter to spy on the separatists and on any German who gave help or information to the French. The group not only discovered pro-French elements in the German population, but also executed some of them as traitors. Many members of the government of the Rhenish Republic were shot by the Free Corps.

The Free Corps operated as secret groups in the Ruhr in the face of the opposition of the Berlin Government and the Reichswehr, as well as the French military forces. The efficient French controls made impossible any widespread action and after Schlageter was shot and numerous other activists sent to the French penal colonies, the Free Corps opposition subsided.

II. THE SECRET AND CAMOUFLAGED SOCIETIES

By 1920, the actions of the Free Corps had developed to such proportions that action was taken against them by the German Government and the Allied states. In that year the Allies ordered the dissolution of all Free Corps and Home Defense Leagues and the turning in of all arms.[1] International controls were established in Germany and police officials were authorized to collect the forbidden arms and to turn them over to the Allied authorities, making necessary a change in tactics by the nationalist forces.

An attempt by the Free Corps leaders to continue their actions by legal means did not succeed. In 1922, various Free Corps leaders established the German Racial Liberty Party (Deutsche Volkischen Freihertspartei)based on the theory of racial nationalism and seeking the destruction of the peace settlement and the revival of German power. The party was composed of splinter groups of the extreme rightist parties and the Free Corps. It secured the support of three Reichstag deputies led by von Graefe and in the elections of 1924 the party obtained nearly two million votes. The Racial Liberty Party sponsored the formation of military leagues, camouflaged as sports associations under the leadership of the notorious Rossbach. In 1923, these leagues were offered by von Graefe to the government with the suggestion that under the command of Ludendorff they could be used to suppress the Social Democrats and Communists as a prelude to war against the French in the Ruhr. This plan was opposed by the Reichswehr, and Rossbach was arrested and kept in prison until the end of the year, while Ludendorff wandered back to Munich to help Hitler in the Beer Hall Putsch.

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1. Daniels, Rise of the German Republic, pp. 157-158.

By the end of 1924, the Racial Liberty Party had lost its strength as the majority of the members either returned to the rightist parties or joined the Nazis.

The most effective form of organized activity was the secret and camouflaged groups. The entire list of secret societies is too numerous to mention. The following list includes some of the important examples of illegal or camouflaged societies which existed in Germany to carry on the fight against the Weimar state and the peace structure.

A. Organization Consul (OC)

The OC was formed by the officers of the Ehrhardt Brigade and the Garde Kavalerie Schützen Division. After the failure of the Kapp Putsch, Ehrhardt fled to Hungary through the friendly help of the Munich police, where he lived under the protection of Gömbös, who later did the Nazis great service as Prime Minister of Hungary. Ehrhardt returned to Munich with a false passport issued to Consul von Eschwege, hence the name Organization Consul. He lived with Princess Hohenlohe and his organization is alleged to have been financed by the remnants of the old Pan-German League.

The OC was in no sense a mass organization and contained few bourgeois elements, except those specifically employed to carry out acts of violence. According to its statutes, the aristocratic officer personnel combated the "anti-national Weimar constitution." Their aims were stated as: the prevention of the complete revolutionizing of Germany; the creation of a strong national government to prevent internal disorder; the negation of the Versailles decision to disarm Germany. The OC was strictly authoritarian, and the entire organization was based on unquestioning obedience. Provisions were made for punishing those who betrayed its secrets, and since the OC operated outside the pale of law,

it utilized the apparatus of the Feme murder to enforce its decisions.

The basic method of attack employed by the OC was murder. In 1921, two members of the organization, Heinrich Schulz and Heinrich Tillessen, assassinated the Centrist deputy Erzberger who had signed the armistice and who was held responsible for the "stab in the back." The details of the murder were planned by Manfred von Killinger. The murderers fled to Munich and police officials helped them to proceed to Hungary where, like Ehrhardt, they lived at the country estate of Gömbös.

The Hungarian Government refused to permit the extradition of the murderers. Killinger was sentenced to eight months in jail. After serving his sentence, he was given the position of manager of the Junkers airplane plant in Spain, which manufactured illegal military aircraft for the German army. In 1929, Killinger was elected as a deputy of the Nazi Party to the Saxon Landtag, and after 1933 he rose quickly in the party hierarchy, becoming Minister President of Saxony, Consul-General in Los Angeles, and later Minister to Rumania. In the following year, two other members of the OC, Kern and Fischer, assassinated Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau. The murderers were killed by the police. The details of the murder were planned by Techow, who was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. After a short time he escaped and joined the French Foreign Legion, reappearing in 1940 as a French officer in Marseille selling false passports to German refugees. Ehrhardt was arrested under the name of Eschwege, but was freed when his comrades broke into the jail and killed his guards. After the farcical trial of the OC in 1924, Ehrhardt was pardoned by the government amnesty of that year and his full pension rights were restored. It is rumored that he disappeared in the Nazi purge of 1934.

The OC was essentially a coordinating agency directing the activities of organizations which enjoyed the benefits of legality. The chief front organizations for the OC were the Vikingbund and the Neudeutsche Bund which openly engaged in pre-military training.

B. Oberland Bund and Werwolf

Another subversive organization which carried on the ideal of the Free Corps was the Oberland Bund, a product of Bavarian separatism and opposition to rule exercised from Berlin.[1] The group came into existence at the time of the Bavarian Soviet Republic when soldiers from the Alpine Corps of the Imperial Army formed a Free Corps at Eichstätt. As the Corps increased in size, it changed its name to the Freikorps Oberland and after 1920 to the Oberland Bund. The edelweiss symbol of the Bund was a familiar sight in German illegal fighting in Munich and in Upper Silesia, where a number of men were lost in the storming of Annaberg. After 1920, the Bund engaged in political activity and propaganda in Munich. Its periodical Das dritte Reich advocated the "liberation" of Germany from the peace treaties and the inclusion of all Germans into a "Third Reich," with a government based on the leadership principle strong enough to dominate all economic groups (i.e., trade unions) in the country. Under the leadership of Dr. Weber, the Bund attempted to concentrate on education and propaganda as preparation for a long-term plan of rearmament and racial nationalism, but in 1923 the urge to fight in the Ruhr was too strong to withstand. Driven from the Ruhr by the French, the Bund joined Hitler in the Munich Putsch. The organization was outlawed in 1923 by the national government and the state governments in Bavaria, Prussia and Saxony. However, the Bund

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1. Posse, Politische Kampfbünde, p. 45 ff.

continued as a secret organization, concentrating its personnel and ideology in the Werwolf, a nationalistic organization founded in Halle on the day that the French entered the Ruhr.

The Werwolf Mitteldeutscher Schutzverband shortly after its founding by Hauptmann Fritz Kloppe changed its name to Werwolf Bund deutscher Männer und Frontkrieger. It was intended originally as a youth organization, but soon developed into a military league to create a trained reserve for the Reichswehr. The ideology of Werwolf followed the line of the Oberland Bund in opposing "plutocratic, international, and Jewish capitalism," but unlike the Bund and the Nazis they advocated a union with Soviet Russia to achieve this end. The Werwolf is an outstanding example of the National Bolshevist movement in Germany which hoped to unite the militarist and revolutionary elements against the Weimar state and the Western European powers. A youth organization called Jungwolf provided pre-military training for approximately 30,000 members. In 1929, Werwolf decided to enter politics and was absorbed into several of the extremist right parties.

C. Orgesch

Another example of the military leagues which attempted to perpetuate the spirit of the Free Corps was the Orgesch in Bavaria. The Organisation Escherich (Orgesch) was founded by Georg Escherich after Bavaria declined to obey the Reich order to dissolve the home defense leagues (Einwohnerwehr) in 1920. It was an attempt to organize the petty bourgeoisie by stressing that Germany was controlled by the "Berlin Bolshevists" and that the Bavarian "mission" was to purge Germany of all revolutionary elements. Dr. Escherich wanted to extend the Orgesch from Bavaria to the entire Reich in order to overthrow the Berlin Government and institute Bavarian rule in Germany.

Orgesch was a fighting organization based on military lines and formations. It possessed a considerable arsenal taken from German army stores which the Bavarian government in 1921 estimated to contain 240,000 rifles, 2,780 machine guns, 44 field pieces and 34 mine throwers.[1] The members fought in Munich in 1919-1920 and formed a major part of the German forces in Upper Silesia. After 1921, Orgesch was active in Bavarian politics until its members were gradually absorbed into the Nazi Party.

D. Other Groups

Many small groups in camouflaged form engaged in illegal military training or in teaching the ideals of militant nationalism. Among them, the following may be mentioned:

1. Blücherbund was a group which broke away from the Oberland Bund over the question of tactics. It was founded by Arnold Rugge, a Heidelberg University teacher, who was successful in organizing students to take more violent action against the "Marxist North" of Germany than was advocated by the parent organization. It was active in the Ruhr in 1923.

2. Grossdeutsche Jugendbund was founded in Berlin after the war to revive the old Prussian ideas of authority and discipline and to preach the new doctrine of racial nationalism.

3. Stahlhelm, the organization of veterans, established youth organizations which became the haven of ex-Free Corps members. The most important was Jungstahlhelm with 60,000 members. The Scharnhorst Bund and Konigin Luise provided anti-republican indoctrination and training in the traditional military virtues for young boys and girls. Another reactionary veterans organization, Kyffhäuser Bund, provided pre-military training for youths in the Kyffhäuser Jugend.

1. Daniels, Rise of the German Republic, p. 157-8.

4. Bismarck Bund with 30,000 members was the youth organization of the Deutschnationale Volkspartei, the most outspoken of the anti-republican parties with the exception of the Nazis. The Bismarck Bund with its system of military training and development of putschist attitudes was one of the most active successors of the Free Corps.

5. Jugendbund Schlageter and Deutschvölkisher Jugendbund Graf Yorck von Wartenburg were, as their names imply, organizations created by the Free Corps of the same name to provide illegal military training for the Reichswehr reserve. Their ideological training stressed Germany's military and mythological past and held that German honor could be avenged only by violent action.

E. The Black Reichswehr and the Feme Murders

While the Free Corps and illegal groups were spontaneous organizations without any central directing agency, the Army attempted to create an integrated and controlled military reserve. The most significant group sponsored and directed by it was the Black Reichswehr (Schwarze Reichswehr) recruited from among the Free Corps fighters returning from Upper Silesia in 1920.

The Black Reichswehr was formed by the Army with the knowledge of the civil government. It was armed and clothed from government stores, and led by Reichswehr officers who had formerly been prominent in Free Corps activity, including Kottbus, Buchrucker (Freikorps Eulenberg), and Paul Schulz. The Reichswehr insisted that the Free Corps men join as individuals and not as groups. The basis for the Reichswehr opposition to the group enlistment of the Free Corps was their distrust of the radical theories of race and nationalism which they feared would produce a political army. Likewise, the Free Corps' conception of group solidarity and leadership

conflicted with the Army's insistence on discipline and integration. In spite of the Reichswehr's efforts, the Black Reichswehr turned out to be a heterogeneous group representing many conflicting political viewpoints and interests.

The Black Reichswehr was commanded by the chief of staff of the III Reichswehr division (Wehrkreiskommando III), Oberstleutnant Fédor von Bock (later Field Marshal). The tactical command of the 18,000 secret members in this district was in the hands of Major von Buchrucker. A Kommando zur besonderen Werwendung was located in Berlin under the command of Klapproth, Rüschung, and Fahlbusch, all of whom were members of the OC. The same structural basis of the army was maintained in the Black Reichswehr. Each group was assigned a district under the command of a "Führer" and was charged with "carrying out all measures necessary for the maintenance of the state and army." Thus, a parallel organization to the Reichswehr was built in each Wehrkreiskommando, and in several districts the secret army outnumbered the army permitted in the peace treaty. The liaison officer between the Reichswehr and the illegal army was the then Captain Eugen Ott, who is at present the Nazi ambassador to Japan.

Major Buchrucker, the leader in Wehrkreiskommando III, had ideas of his own about the use of the troops during the Ruhr struggle which conflicted with the policy of the state and Army. On 15 September 1923, Buchrucker ordered the mobilization of the Black Reichswehr, Free Corps and military leagues in his district preparatory to laying siege to Berlin. He attempted to get the Reichswehr commander in the Küstrin garrison to join the movement, but the plan miscarried and many members of the Black Reichswehr were

killed in the so-called Küstrin Putsch. Buchrucker was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison and the Black Reichswehr was broken up. The Army had all along feared its political orientation and objectives, while the many Feme murders which accompanied its activity threatened the disclosure of its sources of arms and secret connections.

After the Küstrin Putsch the government was forced to investigate the entire existence of secret military organizations in the Reich. The Feme[1] murder was the obvious means by which illegal groups maintained their secrecy and protected their organizations against provocative agents. The secret and illegal groups murdered any member who withdrew or aroused suspicions that he might betray sources of arms and finance or the membership to the government authorities. The device was particularly useful to the Black Reichswehr since any revelation of the arms supply or connection with the army would seriously compromise not only the movement itself but the German Government as well. The Feme murders aroused great admiration in German nationalist circles. After 1923, the government made various efforts to bring the Feme murders to an end, but they continued on a diminished scale throughout the Weimar period.

F. The Lack of Controls

The Free Corps were able to act vigorously for a while because of the nature of the controls established by the peace settlement and the attitude of the German government. Effective controls were not created by the Allied states until 1920, giving the Free Corps the opportunity to recruit members, collect arms, and consolidate their group organizations. The

1. The mechanism of the Feme murder was named after the Vehmgericht trials of the Middle Ages which were held by secret courts operating in the name of the Emperor without regard for the law and judicial procedures of the localities in which they existed.

control system which utilized German army and administrative personnel to discover and confiscate arms permitted large caches of arms to remain in the hands of the illegal groups. This practice permitted the basic problem of arms control to remain in the hands of those who sympathized with the Free Corps' objective of German rearmament. In the face of popular demonstrations against Allied control officers whenever they made their appearance, the search for arms was left almost entirely to German personnel.

In addition to the time lag between defeat and arms control, the International Commission in Germany proved to be lax in its disarmament efforts. The Allies did not oppose the arming of German volunteer units in the Baltic war, while in upper Silesia the Free Corps openly collected arms and fought the Poles. The only effective control of Free Corps activity was exercised by the French in the Ruhr (1923) where illegal action threatened the military security of the occupation forces.

Due to the attitudes of the army and judiciary, the German Government was not able to exercise its legal powers to control illegal activity. The courts, composed of judges held over from the Imperial regime, refused to punish the officers who engaged in the Kapp Putsch of 1920 except to impose rather light sentences in a few cases. The courts likewise refused to deprive those convicted of political murder or treasonable activity of their pension rights. The punishment of the Feme murderers of the Black Reichswehr was made practically impossible by a judicial decision which prevented any disclosure of the source of arms or the nature of the organization of the secret group on the grounds that such evidence would be dangerous to national security. The differences between the courts and the political leadership

of the state on this question were often the subject of debate in the Reichstag and in the Prussian Diet, but the arguments of the Reichswehr and courts prevailed. The Feme murderers went unpunished. The only element in the state able to control the illegal groups was the Reichswehr. Whenever the activities of the groups conflicted with the political policy of the Army, as in the case of the Black Reichswehr and the Ruhr fight in 1923, the generals did not hesitate to use superior force. This means of control proved to be effective.

III. THE FREE CORPS SURVIVAL IN GERMANY

A. The Free Corps and the Army

The Free Corps and military leagues persisted in Germany in various ways. After the dissolution of the corps, one form of survival was in the Reichswehr. When the treaty army was formed, many of the Free Corps became cadres for Reichswehr regiments. These corps, serving as transitional defense forces in the administrative areas of the Imperial Army, changed their names and became units of the new army stationed in the areas in which they had formerly served as volunteers.[1] The Army, however, exercised a careful political scrutiny over prospective members and refused to admit any who were identified with the Rossbach Brigade, Freikorps Aulock, Selbstschutz Kompagnie Schlageter. Likewise, they disapproved of the putschist tactics of the Free Corps, and numerous officers, including Captain Röhm and General von Epp, were forced to resign their commissions. The Reichswehr accepted only those men they could control and stamp with their own political viewpoint. The activists were left to their own devices.

B. The Free Corps and the Nazi Party

After the events of 1923, economic conditions in Germany were gradually stabilized and adjustments were made in both German and Allied foreign policy which tended to remove the most objectionable controls stipulated in the peace treaty. With the end of inflation, the return of employment, and the gradual acceptance of Germany into the European state system,

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1. Some examples are:
   Landesjägerkorps Maercker -- Reichswehr Brigade 16
   Freikorps Dohna -- Reichswehr Grenadier Regiment 53
   Freikorps Düsseldorf -- Reichswehr Schützen Regiment 61
   Freikorps Faupel -- Reichswehr Grenadier Regiment 10
   Freikorps Hasse -- Reichswehr Infantrie Regiment 108
   A full list of the Free Corps which became units in the Reichswehr is given in Schmidt-Pauli, Geschichte der Freikorps, p. 354 ff.

the basic reasons for the existence of the Free Corps and secret military leagues disappeared and the average members were absorbed into peaceful civilian life. This situation, however, did not affect the activists -- the "irregulars" who could not adapt themselves to the prevailing social structure. They continued their activities, such as Feme murders and secret military training, but gradually found a haven in the Nazi Party with its doctrines of Greater Germany and anti-Semitism, and its methods of violence and street fighting.

In the years from 1924 to 1927, a number of Free Corps fighters entered the Nazi Party and rose to positions of prominence. How many rank and file members entered the SA and SS cannot be ascertained. The outstanding example of a Free Corps fighter who became a prominent Nazi is Martin Bormann, ex-chief of staff of the Rossbach Brigade. After serving a term in prison for political murder, Bormann entered the NSDAP in 1925 and is now Chief of the Party Chancellory.

Free Corps personnel also remained in the state administration and formed subversive cells which helped to prepare the way for the Nazi acquisition of power. Many examples of the creation of cells in the administrative structure have been glorified in the extensive literature which the Nazis have issued on the activities of the Free Corps. Particularly important were the Free Corps cells in the police forces of Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Göttingen, Stettin and other German cities which gradually came under the control of the Nazis.[1]

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1. CID 62453-C; Nazi publications on the Free Corps, such as Schmidt-Pauli, Geschichte der Freikorps; von Oertzen, Die deutschen Freikorps; Kurt Hotzel, Deutscher Aufstand and the Darstellungen aus den Nachkriegskämpfen deutscher Truppen und Freikorps, contain thorough descriptions of the methods of forming secret military leagues, strategy, supply and transportation, and illegal operations against popular authority.

Appendix I. FREE CORPS MEMBERS PROMINENT IN THE NAZI PARTY

The following is a list of a few of the prominent Nazis who began their political career during the Weimar Republic as members of Free Corps and the secret societies. This list is derived from references in von Oertzen, Die deutschen Freikorps, Schmidt-Pauli, Geschichte des deutschen Freikorps, Führer-Lexikon, and from material in Biographical Records, OSS:

ADAMS, Josef-Joachim	Landeshauptmann, Lower Silesia
ALPERS, Friedrich	SS Obergruppenführer, Sec.of State to Reich Master of Forests; General Forstmeister
ARENT, Benno von	Official Nazi stage designer
BANNEMANN, Emil	Gauobmann Schleswig-Holstein
BECKERLE, Adolf Heinz	German Minister to Bulgaria; SA Obergruppenführer
BITTRICH, Willi	SS Gruppenführer
BLOME, Kurt	Chief of the Reich Physicians' League; Deputy Reich Health Leader
BORMANN, Martin	Chief of Party Chancellory; SS Obergruppenführer (Rossbach Brigade)
BERNDT, Alfred-Ingemar	Chief of Radio Section, Propaganda Ministry; SS Brigadeführer
BUCHNER, Franz	Deputy Gauleiter, Munich
BUTTMAN, Rudolf	Reichstags Member; Retired Ministerial Director
DALUEGE, Kurt	SS Oberstgruppenführer; Chief of Uniformed Police, Ministry of Interior; Deputy Protector, Bohemia and Moravia (inactive)
DIETRICH, Sepp	SS Oberstgruppenführer; Generaloberst of Waffen SS
DORSCH, Xaver	Chief of Field Command of OT; Ministerial-director in Ministry for Armaments and War Production

EBERSTEIN, Friedrich Karl von	SS Obergruppenführer; Police President, Munich (Brigade Erhardt)
ELTZ-RÜBENACH, Cuno von	Landesbauernführer, Rheinprovinz
EMMERT, Ernst	President, Oberlandesgericht, Nürnberg
EGGELING, Joachim Albrecht	Gauleiter, Halle-Merseburg; SS Obergruppenführer
ENGELBRECHT, Otto	NSKOV
ENGLER-FÜSSLEN, Fritz	SS Standarternführer; Gauamtsleiter, Baden-Elsass
EPP, Franz von	Reichsleiter; Reichsstatthalter, Bavaria; SS Obergruppenführer
ERDMANN, Walter	Landesbauernführer, Saxony
FLORIAN, Friedrich	Gauleiter, Düsseldorf; Prussian State Councillor, SA Gruppenführer
FREYTAG, Hermann	Oberbürgermeister Duisburg
FRICK, Wilhelm	Former Reich Minister of Interior; Reich Protector, Bohemia-Moravia
FRITSCH, Karl	SS and SA Brigadeführer; Sax. Minister of Interior
GANZENMÜLLER, Albert	Sec. of State in Ministry of Transport; SA Brigadeführer
GLASMEIER, Heinrich	Director, Grossdeutscher Rundfunk
GREISER, Artur	Reichs Governor and Gauleiter, Wartheland; SS Obergruppenführer
GRITZBACH, Erich	Press Chief of Prussian Government; Chief of Staff, Office of Reich Marshal
GROENEVELD, Jaques	Landesbauernführer, Weser-Ems
GROHÉ, Josef	Gauleiter, Cologne-Aachen; SS Obergruppenführer
GUTTERER, Leopold	Chairman, Board of Directors, UFA; former Secretary of State, Reich Propaganda Ministry
HADAMOVSKY, Eugen	Chief of Staff, Reich Propaganda Ministry
HAYLER, Franz	Secretary of State, Reich Ministry of Economics; SS Brigadeführer

HELLMUTH, Otto	Gauleiter, Mainfranken
HERGENRÖDER, Adolf	Member of Reichstag; Gauamtsleiter; SS Hauptsturmführer
HESS, Rudolf	Deputy to Hitler until 19 October 1941, when he fled to England
HIERL, Konstantin	Reichsleiter; Chief, Reich Labor Service
HILDEBRANT, Friedrich	Gauleiter, Mecklenburg-Schwerin; SS Obergruppenführer
HINKEL, Hans	Secretary General and Chief Editor, Reich Chamber of Culture
HÖLFE, Hermann	NSKK Obergruppenführer; Senior SS and Police Leader of Military District XI
HÜHNLEIN, Adolf	Formerly Korpsführer of NSKK (dead)
ILGNER, Max	Director, I. G. Farben, Stiokstoff Syndikat, etc.
JÖHLITZ, Fritz	Member, Reich Commissariat, Norway; Manager, Essen Gau Labor Office
JORDN, Rudolf	SA Obergruppenführer; Gauleiter, Magdeburg-Anhalt
JÜTTNER, Max	Chief, SA Führungsamt; SA Obergruppenführer
KANSTEIN, Paul	District President of Hanover, SS Brigadefuhrer
KASCHE, Siegfried	German Minister to Croatia; SA Obergruppenführer
KAUFMANN, Karl	NSKK and SS Obergruppenführer; Gauleiter and Reichsstatthalter, Hamburg
KILLINGER, Manfred von	SA Obergruppenführer; former Minister to Rumania (dead)
KLEINHEISTERKAMP, Matthias	SS Gruppenführer; Cmdr. of SS Mountain Division "Nord"
KLEINMANN, Wilhelm	SA Obergruppenführer; Sec. of State in Ministry of Transport until 1942
KOCH, Erich	Reich Commissioner, Ukraine; Gauleiter, East Prussia
KOLBOW, Karl Friedrich	Landeshauptmann, Westphalia

KRÜGER, Frederick-Wilhelm	SS Obergruppenführer; Government-General (reported killed)
KRÜGER, Walter	SS Obergruppenführer; Cmdr. of SS Division "Das Reich"
KÜCHLER, Georg von	Generalfeldmarschall (retired)
KUNISCH, Siegmund	Chief of Central Dept. in Ministry of Education
LEIBRANDT, Georg	Min. Dir., Reich Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories
LINDEN, Karl	Deputy Gauleiter, Hessen-Nassau
LOEPER, Friedrich von	SA Standartenführer; Deputy President of Reich ARP League
LOEPER, Wilhelm	Formerly Reichsstatthalter of Brunswick and Anhalt (died in 1936)
LORENZ, Werner	SS Obergruppenführer; Chief of Resettlement Staff, Reichskommissar für die Festigung der Deutschen Volkstums
LUTZE, Viktor	Chief of Staff, SA (dead)
MAGUNIA, Waldemar	Party official in East Prussia, held post of Commissioner General of Kiev
MANSFELD, Werner	Min. Dir., Reich Ministry of Labor in 1933,, presumably dismissed in 1942
MAYR, Franz	SS Brigadeführer; District President, Upper Bavaria
MEINBERG, Wilhelm	SS Gruppenführer; Commissioner for Transport of Fuel on Board of Four Year Plan
MILCH, Erhard	Member of Armament Council; General Feld Marschall (Luftwaffe)
MÜHLEN, Leo von	Director, Central Office for East Research
MÜLLER, Henrich	President, Rechnungshof des deutschen Reiches
MÜNDLER, Anton	Deputy Gauleiter, Swavia
MÜNDERLER, Eugen	Chief Editor, Das Reich
NAGEL, Willi	NSKK, Gruppenführer; Commander of Transport Corps, Organisation Todt
NEUBERT, Reinhard	President, Reichs Lawyers Chamber

PREL, Max	Secretary, Feder. of National Journalist Associations; Reichsamtleiter; member of Executive Council of German Law Front
PRIESS, Hermann	SS Gruppenführer; Cmdr. of an SS Division
RAUTER, Hanns	SS chief in Netherlands; SS Obergruppenführer
REEDER, Eggert	Chief of Military Administration, Belgium; SS Obergruppenführer
RIECKE, Hans Joachim	Secretary of State in Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture; SA Gruppenführer
RUBERT, Fritz Bombard	SS Brigadeführer; Deputy Gauleiter, Foreign Org. of NSDAP
RUSH, Bernhard	Reich Minister for Science and Education; SA Obergruppenführer
SAUPERT, Hans	Chief of Staff and Deputy of Reich Treasurer; SS Brigadeführer
SCHEPMANN, Wilhelm	Chief of Staff, SA
SCHMEIDLER, Herbert	Official in RAD; Obergeneralarbeitsführer
SCHMELT, Albrecht	District President, Oppeln; SS Brigadeführer
SCHNEIDHUBER	Formerly leading man in SA (shot in purge, June 1934)
SEEBAUER	Chief of Production Division in Ministry for Armaments and War Production
SEGELKEN, Hans	Head of Dept. in Ministry of Justice
SEIDLER, Walther	Reichstags member; SS Standartenführer
SELZNER, Klaus	Commissioner General, Dnjepropetrovsk; Reichobmann, NSBO (dead)
SIMON, Gustav	Gauleiter, Moselland
STANGIER, Peter	Deputy Gauleiter Westphalia-North; SA Gruppenführer
STEINER, Felix	SS Gruppenführer; Cmdr. of third SS Armoured Corps

STRASSER, Gregor	Chief Organizer of Party until December 1932 (dead)
STUCKART, Wilhelm	Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior; SS Obergruppenführer
TESCHE, Georg	Deputy Gauleiter, Halle-Merseburg
TRAEG, Georg	Deputy Gauleiter, Schwaben
TURNER, Harald	Chief of Military Administration in Occupied Serbia
UEBELHOER, Friedrich	District President, Merseburg
WALDECK-PYRMONT, Josias Prince von	Senior SS and Police Leader in Military District IX; SS Obergruppenführer
WEBER, Friedrich	Chief, Department III, Ministry of Interior; SS Brigadeführer
WEINRICH, Karl	Formerly Gauleiter, Kurhessen; SS Gruppenführer; NSKK Obergruppenführer
WEISS, Wilhelm	SS Obergruppenführer; Chief Editor, Völkischer Beobachter
WOLFF, Karl	SS Obergruppenführer; chief of Himmler's personal staff
WOYRSCH, Udo von	SS Obergruppenführer; Senior SS and Police Leader in Military District IV